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The Earliest Conversion of the Rus′ to Christianity

K. ERICSSON

THE conversion of the Rus′ to Christianity in the 9th century, some time between A.D. 860 and 867, is a fact well attested both by Russian and Byzantine sources. However, Russian chroniclers erased all straightforward evidence recording this conversion, in order not to diminish the glorification of Volodimer as the first ruler of Rus′ to accept baptism, so that only indirect traces were left, pointing unmistakably towards Christianisation in the 9th century. Thus the silence of the Russian annals can be easily explained, but the scanty records of Byzantine annals concerning the conversion of the *Rhos* in the 860s present a problem: the patriarch Photius mentions it with great pride in his encyclical letter to the eastern patriarchs; the conversion of the Bulgarians is recorded in great detail in Byzantine chronicles, yet, concerning the Rhos, only a few scanty lines in a few chronicles mention that after the attack on Constantinople of 860 they asked for baptism, which was granted, and received a bishop. That Byzantine annals ignore Volodimer's conversion is natural, for his was not the initial conversion of the Rhos. But the Christianisation in the days of Photius is treated as if it were not the initial conversion either, although no records have ever come to light pointing towards an earlier baptism of the Rhos.

However, one has to remember that for a period of thirty years during the first half of the 9th century the ecclesiastical policy of Constantinople is shrouded in darkness. After the first period of iconoclasm in the 8th century and the first restoration of icon-worship in 787 by the empress Irene followed the second and last period of iconoclasm, the last great heresy of the eastern church, when in 815 Leo V the Armenian deposed the iconodule patriarch Nicephorus, enthroned an iconoclast as patriarch and convoked the iconoclastic council of St Sophia, once more restoring iconoclasm, which lasted to the death of Theophilus, the last iconoclast emperor, in 842.

I

The majority of Russian Christian names were taken over in their Greek form, but apart from the classical names Faith, Hope, Charity —Vera, Nadezhda, Lyubov′, three names have survived in their translated form from Greek to Russian: Lev, Bogdan and Bogolyub, i.e. Leo, Theodotus and Theophilus, all three being the names of the

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most prominent iconoclasts of the 9th century, the emperors Leo V and Theophilus, and the iconoclast patriarch at the council of St Sophia in 815, Theodotus Kassiteras.

The date of the seventh ecumenical council of 787, when icon-worship was restored, is correctly preserved by the chronicles as A.M. 6298 and A.M. 6286–7,[1] according to different eras. However, another date has also been preserved. The Nikon Chronicle and the Chronograph of 1512 give the following dates for the seventh council:

...Отъ Адама лѣтъ 6300 и 5, а отъ Спаса нашего Бога лѣтъ осмьсотъ и 5.[2]

This is evidently a date of the Pseudo-Alexandrian era (see below), 805, when no council was held. However, the conjunction 'и' could have been misspelled for the letter 'i', denoting the numeral 10, in which case the date would imply A.M. 6315, Anno Christi 815, the date of the iconoclastic council of St Sophia under Leo V, when not icon-worship but iconoclasm was restored.

The same year 815 as the year of the seventh council emerges from two other chronological calculations. The 'Prelozheniye knig' is assigned to the twelfth year of Leo VI, i.e. 898 (the actual year varies slightly—A.M. 6405, 6406, 6407), 30 years after the baptism of Bulgaria and 77 years since the seventh ecumenical council:

Во второенадесять лѣто царства его преложени быша книгы отъ Греческаго языка на Словеньскій. Естъ же отъ крещеніа Болгарьскаго до преложеніа книгъ лѣтъ 30, а отъ 7. собора до преложеніа книгъ лѣтъ 77, а отъ Адама лѣтъ 6000 и 400 и 5.[3]

Thirty years before 898 (A.M. 6405–6), in 869, Bulgaria returned from the see of Rome to the see of Constantinople, having been baptised six years before 863. Here the chronicler falls six years short of the real date. Deducting the 77 years which are supposed to have passed since the seventh council from 898, one reaches 821, an impossible date for the seventh council (787). But accounting for the same error of six years as the date of the alleged baptism of Bulgaria, one reaches 815, the date of the iconoclastic council of St Sophia.

[1] A.M.6298: Chronograph of 1512, *Polnoye sobraniye russkikh letopisey* (hereafter quoted as PSRL), St Petersburg, 1911, XXII, 1, p. 19. A.M. 6287: Istoricheskaya Paleya, *Chteniya obshchestva istorii i drevnostey rossiyskikh*, I, St Petersburg, 1881 (ed. A. N. Popov), p. xxi. AM.6286: Chronicle of L'vov, PSRL, 1910, XX, p. 36. The so-called Alexandrian era (Christ born Anno Mundi 5500 in contrast to the Byzantine era) as generally referred to by Russian historians is different from the genuine Alexandrian era of Annianos, as used by Georgius Syncellus and Theophanes Continuatus, and therefore will here be referred to as the 'Pseudo-Alexandrian era'.

[2] Nikon Chronicle, PSRL, 1862, IX, p. xix. Chronograph of 1512, PSRL, XXII, p. 322.

[3] 'In the twelfth year of his (Leo VI's) reign, the books were translated from Greek into Slavonic. From the baptism of Bulgaria to the translation of books it is 30 years, from the seventh council to the translation of books 77 years, and from Adam 6000 and 400 and 5 years.' (Nikon Chronicle, p. xx.)

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Furthermore, the Russian chronicles name the years that elapsed between the seven ecumenical councils, which are in general correct except for the time between the sixth and seventh councils, where all Russian annals show the same wrong number—122 years, while in fact only 106–7 years had passed between the sixth council (680–1) and the seventh (787).

> ...Отъ 6. же собора до 7. лѣтъ 122, а ото Адама лѣтъ 6305, а отъ воплощеніа Господня лѣтъ осмьсотъ и пять.[4]

However, deducting 122 years from 815 one reaches 692, the year of the council in Trullo, the Quinisext, when under Justinian II the eastern church prohibited the representation of Christ in the form of a lamb. This may well be regarded as the first step towards iconoclasm, the dissociation of Christian worship from any form of old pagan worship, in which the deity used to be represented in the form of an animal.

Russian chronography thus seems to have preserved a most interesting piece of iconoclastic heritage: recognition of the Trullan Council (692) as the sixth ecumenical council and the council of St Sophia (815) as the seventh council (and not the council of Nicaea—787). Since all iconoclastic writings and records were ruthlessly destroyed by the later orthodox authorities, the question arises as to how and when they could have found their way into Russian annals. The only possible conclusion is the assumption that these dates were introduced into Russian writings by the iconoclasts themselves during the iconoclast period, i.e. before the death of the last iconoclast emperor Theophilus/Bogolyub in 842. Consequently the Rus′ must have been converted to Christianity for the first time by the last ruling heretics of the eastern church, the iconoclasts. This fact would account both for the translation of prominent iconoclastic names into Russian, Leo/Lev, Theodotus/Bogdan and Theophilus/Bogolyub, and for the date of the seventh council given as A.M.6315 (815) and not 787, as well as for the fact that the conversion in the second half of the 9th century under Michael III and Photius was ignored despite its beneficial political aspects, because it was not the initial baptism of the Rhos, while all the records concerning their first conversion by the hated heretics were destroyed.

II

Russian and Byzantine sources bring further evidence to light. A tale in Theophanes Continuatus, placed among the chapters relating

[4] 'From the sixth to the seventh council 122 years, and from Adam 6305 years, and from the Incarnation of our Lord eight hundred and five years.' (Chronograph of 1512, p. 322; Nikon Chronicle, p. xix.)

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to Michael II (820–9), tells how in the reign of his son and successor Theophilus (829–42) a savage people had grown so bold as to attack the empire, and the emperor in despair turned towards John the Grammarian, one of the most learned men of his time, for help. John the Grammarian, the last iconoclast patriarch, whom the iconodule writer depicts as an evil sorcerer, transferred by means of black magic the life blood of the three pagan chiefs, who led the attack, into a three-headed bronze statue on the hippodrome. By night he ordered three strong men to strike at the three heads of the statue with hammers; two heads fell off, the third was damaged. As a result of his sorcery the three pagan chiefs quarrelled, one beheaded the other two and himself retreated in disgrace. The story is illustrated by the Madrid Skylitzes.

The legendary elements of this story, intended to blacken the hated iconoclast patriarch John, cannot discredit the actual facts: it is clear that somebody did attack the empire, having only recently grown so dangerous, and was defeated thanks to the diplomacy of the learned patriarch, himself not only a scholar but also an experienced diplomat. Th. Uspensky thought that the attackers were none other than the Rus'.[5] In the 830s both Cherson in the Crimea and the Khazar kingdom were harassed by a barbaric people from the north, and with combined effort the imperial government and the Khazars tried to defend their borders; Cherson, considered to be in grave danger, received a *strategos* in 832, and with the aid of Byzantine engineers the Khazars erected the fortress of Sarkel near the Don in 834.

Uspensky thought that the attack took place in 831. A Russian attack on Constantinople is mentioned by the Tolkovaya Paleya as early as A.M. 6331–4 (831–4, Pseudo-Alexandrian era).[6] The main problem, not mentioned by Uspensky, is not so much the date of the attack, nor even the nationality of the barbarians (they could not be Bulgarians, because the latter were far too well known in Constantinople), as the means which John the Grammarian employed to pacify them, and which the later iconodule writer was unwilling to reveal, substituting the legendary story about black magic for the facts. It could be that the patriarch John, the statesman and diplomat, had proposed Christianity to the pagans, which the last survivor accepted under humiliating conditions, similar to the baptism of Boris of Bulgaria, an act of clemency and Christian merit with which no orthodox writer would ever credit the hated patriarch John.

[5] Th. Uspensky, 'Patriarkh Yoann VII. Grammatik i Rus'-dromity u Simeona Magistra' (*Zhurnal Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveshcheniya*, St Petersburg, 1890, part 267, pp. 1–34).

[6] V. M. Istrin, 'Redaktsii Tolkovoy Paleyi' (*Izvestiya Otdela Russkogo Yazyka i Slovesnosti*, St Petersburg, 1905, p. 202 and 1906, p. 43).

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Without giving a specific date, the majority of Russian chronicles tell of a journey to Constantinople by Kyy, the founder of Kiev and eldest of the three brothers, Kyy, Shchok and Khoriv, the chiefs of the Polyane. The Nikon Chronicle describes him as a very belligerent man, giving details of his military expeditions not contained in the other annals. But like the rest, the Nikon Chronicle seems to reveal the facts about this journey to Constantinople primarily in order to save Kyy from demotion to an ordinary ferryman, which the chronicler emphatically denies; as proof that Kyy was a prince of his people on the Dnepr he gives details of his journey to Constantinople:

Начало о градѣ Кіевѣ:

Поляномъ же живущимъ особь . . . быша же три братіа . . . Кіи . . . Щокъ . . . Хоривъ, а сестра у нихъ Лыбедь . . . Не вѣдяще же нѣціи рекоша: Кій есть былъ перевозникъ; но нѣсть тако: . . . аще бы былъ Кій перевозникъ, не бы *ходилъ къ Царюграду съ силою ратью*; но сей Кій княжаше въ родѣ своемъ и *ратоваше многи страны*; *таже съ Константьтиноградскимъ царемъ миромъ и братьскіи живяше, и велію честь пріимаше отъ него* и отъ всѣхъ.[7]

Stating on the one hand that Kyy came with large military forces to Constantinople, the chronicler is anxious to stress that he lived in peace with the emperor and even received great honours from him, although the nature of these honours is not defined, nor the name of the emperor mentioned. The *Povest'* itself, as preserved by the Laurentius and Hypatius chronicles, contains a curious remark that would seem to reveal that the chronicler was actually trying to conceal the name of the emperor concerned:

Аще бо бы перевозникъ Кий, то не бы ходилъ Царюгороду; но се Кий княжаше въ родѣ своемь, приходившю ему ко царю, якоже сказають, яко велику честь приялъ отъ царя, при которомь приходивь цари.[8]

The last useless phrase, void of any sense—'the emperor, who then was emperor'—indicates plainly that the real name of the emperor was obnoxious to the later orthodox chronicler, as the name of a heretic like the hated iconoclast Theophilus would be.

The similarity to the pagan chief of the three-headed bronze

[7] 'The beginning of the City of Kiev: the Polyane lived independent . . . there were three brothers . . . Kyy . . . Shchok . . . Khoriv and their sister Lybed' . . . Some, who were ignorant, would say, Kyy was a ferryman, but this is not so . . . if Kyy had been a ferryman, he would not have *journeyed to Tsargrad with military forces*; but this Kyy ruled his people and *fought against many countries; thus he lived with the emperor in Constantinople in peace and brotherly (love), and received great honours from him* and from all.' (Nikon Chronicle, p. 4. Italics here and henceforth—K.E.)

[8] 'If Kyy had been a ferryman, he would not have journeyed to Tsargorod; but this Kyy ruled his people, and when he came to the emperor, they say that he received great honours from the emperor, who then was emperor.' (*Povest' vremennykh let*, Moscow/Leningrad, 1950, I, p. 13, hereafter quoted as *Povest'*.)

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statue in Theophanes Continuatus cannot be denied: an aggressive barbarian, one of three chiefs, comes with military forces to Constantinople, and both Theophanes Continuatus and the Russian chronicler are very vague about the treatment he received in Constantinople: the *Povest'* mentions great honours and the peaceful relations that were established; Theophanes Continuatus merely states that the imperial government managed to cope with him, and made him retreat in disgrace. It is noteworthy that according to the *Povest'* Kyy alone came to Constantinople, not Shchok and Khoriv, his younger brothers, and he alone received the high honours. The seeming discrepancy between the *Povest'*'s mention of great honours and Theophanes Continuatus' indication of the opposite could be explained by the fact that the conversion of a defeated pagan to Christianity would be regarded by the converts as an honour, while a Byzantine chronicler would emphasise the defeat.

In any case Kyy retreated from Constantinople with military forces not strong enough to allow him to settle on the Danube, as he intended to—he even founded here another town, Kievets—for the people on the Danube drove him away:

> Идущу же ему *и з вои, на Болгары ходивъ*, и пріиде къ Дунаю, и възлюби мѣсто и създа градъ, хотя тамо сѣсти съ роды своими, и *не даша ему тамо живущеи, всегда рати сотворяюще*; градище же то и донынѣ нарицается тамо живущіими Дунаичи Кіевець. Таже на Воложскіа и Камскіа Болгары ходивъ и побѣди, и возвратився *пріиде въ свой градъ Кіевъ, и ту животъ свой сконча*; *и брата его Щокъ и Хоривъ и сестра ихъ Лыбедь ту скончашася*.[9]

All these enterprises Kyy accomplished alone, without his brothers, and whereas the time of his death is exactly defined (he had returned to Kiev from his victorious campaign against the Bulgars on the Volga and the Kama) his brothers' death is so vaguely described (they too died, together with their sister) that the time of their death may well have preceded the death of Kyy. One may asume that the chronicler was unwilling to reveal the nature of their death. According to Theophanes Continuatus, the surviving pagan chief had beheaded the other two pagans, and inasmuch as Kyy is identical with him, he must have killed his brothers Shchok and Khoriv, a grave crime in the eyes of Christians and pagans alike; no wonder that the chronicler of the *Povest'* remained silent—

[9] 'When he was coming *with his forces he went against the Bulgarians*, and came to the Danube, and liked the place and built a city, trying to settle there with his people, and *those living there would not let him, always fighting*; the town is called up to this day by the Danube people, who live there, Kievets. He also went against the Bulgars on the Volga and the Kama and defeated them, and returned and *came to his town Kiev, and here he ended his life; and his brothers Shchok and Khoriv and their sister Lybed' died, too*.' (Nikon Chronicle, p. 4.)

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in order not to blacken the memory of Kyy, the first Christian ruler on Russian soil, as a fratricide.

If Kyy was christened under Theophilus—his 'great honours from the emperor' implying baptism—one might expect to find the emperor's name Theophilus being given to him, as in later years Boris of Bulgaria received the name of Michael III as his Christian name, and Volodimer was christened Vasily after Basil II. There is no direct evidence or record preserved, indicating that Kyy ever had the name of Theophilus, but the 12th-century grand duke of Kiev, who moved the capital from Kiev to Suzdal' and thus established a new Kiev, another Kyy, was named Andrey Bogolyubsky (Bogolyub/Theophilus), and his own village was called Bogolyubovo.

There is further indirect evidence that Kyy murdered his two brothers Shchok and Khoriv while they were still pagans, and then alone accepted baptism. In 1044, in the reign of Yaroslav the Wise, a curious and unique event took place: the bodies of Volodimer's pagan brothers, Yaroslav's uncles, Yaropolk and Oleg, were exterred and their remains baptised and buried in the church of the Mother of God, where Volodimer himself lay buried:

> В лѣто 6552. Выгребоша 2 князя, Ярополка и Ольга, сына Святославля, и крестиша кости ею, и положиша я въ церкви святыя Богородица.[10]

It seems difficult to find a motive for such an action on Yaroslav's part: Oleg, the second of the three brothers, had been killed unintentionally through his eldest brother Yaropolk, but Yaropolk, the ruling grand duke after Svyatoslav's death, was not only murdered by Volodimer, but was also the real father of Yaroslav's bitterest enemy, Svyatopolk. One fact remains undisputed: in the case of both Kyy and Volodimer, the murderer, as a Christian, could inherit the heavenly kingdom, but not his victims, the two brothers who had died as pagans.

Christianity and baptism did not save Kyy, however; his house perished after his death. At the time of the baptism and reburial of his uncles' remains, Yaroslav must have been gravely concerned for the future of his progeny: the year before, in 1043, he had sent a naval expedition against Constantinople, his men were shipwrecked, captured and blinded in Constantinople, his own eldest son Volodimer only with difficulty escaped this fate (his boat was wrecked, but his father's voyevoda took him into his boat and he returned unharmed). It seems that Yaroslav tried to appease the dead in

[10] 'In the year 6552. They dug up the two princes, Yaropolk and Oleg, the sons of Svyatoslav, and baptised their bones, and laid them in the church of the holy Mother of God.' (*Povest'*, I, p. 104.)

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order to safeguard his own house against the fate of Kyy: by christening the bones of his father's pagan brothers and burying them in church, he enabled the victims of fratricide to enter paradise like their surviving Christian brother, the murderer.

It further appears from the *Vita* of Methodius that he knew of a case in which a hostile pagan prince was captured and christened not in his native land, but on foreign soil, a fate which Methodius predicted to the pagan prince of Visla who scoffed at Christians, as a calamity that might befall him unless he changed his ways:

> Поганьскъ кънязь сильнъ вельми, сѣдѧ въ Вислѣ, ржгааше сѧ христьяномъ и пакости дѣяаше. посълавъ же къ немоу рече: добро ти сѧ крьстити, сыноу, волеѭ своеѭ на своеи земли, *да не плѣненъ нждьми крьштень бждеши на штоуждеи земли*, и помѧнеши мѧ. еже и бысть.[11]

Boris of Bulgaria was christened in his own country, as were the Rhos in the days of Photius. But the last surviving pagan chief in the days of Theophilus, whom John the Grammarian made retreat in disgrace, was no longer in his native land, but near the capital, and Kyy came with large forces to Tsargrad, where he received 'great honours'. This is most likely the precedent which Methodius had in mind when warning the prince of Visla, and confirms the assumption that Kyy and the last pagan chief in Theophanes Continuatus are the same person, receiving baptism as a captive on foreign soil, in Constantinople.

III

The theory that the territory of Kiev was converted for the first time to Christianity as early as the days of Theophilus, that Kyy was the first Christian ruler (not Askold and Dir and not Volodimer) and his people, the Polyane on the Dnepr, the first Christian flock, is attested by various other accounts and sources.

According to the *Povest'* the Polyane were attacked by the neighbouring tribes and finally subjugated by the Khazars, after Kyy and his house had perished:

> По сихъ же лѣтѣхъ, по смерти братьѣ сея быша обидимы древлями и инѣми околними. И наидоша я козарѣ . . .[12]

[11] 'A mighty pagan prince residing in Visla scoffed at Christians and mocked them in every way. Hence, sending unto him said (Methodius): It would be well, my son, if thou wouldst accept baptism, freely in thy own land, for *otherwise thou willst be taken into bondage and forced to receive baptism on alien soil*, recalling the word I have spoken. And so did it come to pass.' (*Vita Methodii*, ed. F. Pastrnek, *Dějiny slovanskych apoštolů Cyrilla a Methoda*, Prague, 1902, p. 232. Translation quoted from K. Lanckorońska, 'Studies on the Roman-Slavonic Rite in Poland'—*Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 161, Rome, 1961, p. 10.)

[12] 'After that time, after the death of those brothers, they (the Polyane) were harassed by the Drevlyane and other neighbours. And the Khazars overcame them. . . .' (*Povest'*, I, p. 16.)

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The Russian chronicler regards the conquest of the Polyane by the Khazars as a calamity of which they were relieved according to the will of God:

Се же сбысться все: не от своея воля рекоша, но от божья повелѣнья.[13]

If the Polyane had been pagans at the time of their subjugation to the Khazars, such a concern of the Almighty would seem unusual. It is even more surprising to see the chronicler equating the Polyane with the righteous Jews in the days of Moses, and the Khazars, who had the Jewish faith, with the evil pagan Egyptians:

Яко и при Фаравонѣ, цари еюпетьстѣмь, егда приведоша Моисѣя . . . якоже и бысть: погибоша еюптяне от Моисѣя, а первое быша работающе имъ. Тако и си владѣша, а послѣже самѣми владѣють; яко же и бысть: володѣють бо козары русьскии князи и до днешнего дне.[14]

This is a slightly unfortunate comparison if the Polyane are supposed to be pagan; but assuming that they had accepted baptism prior to the Khazar conquest, the comparison is perfect: the Christian Polyane are like the Jews, worshipping the true God; the Jewish Khazars are no better than the pagan Egyptians.

The chronicler further describes at great length the modest customs and civilised ways of the Polyane in contrast to the barbaric customs of the other eastern Slavs, who live like animals:

Имаху бо обычаи свои, и законъ отецъ своихъ и преданья, кождо свой нравъ. Поляне бо своих отець обычай имуть *кротокъ и тихъ*, и стыдѣнье къ снохамъ своимъ и къ сестрамъ, ... *брачный обычай имяху* . . . А древляне живяху *звѣриньскимъ образомъ, живуще скотьски: убиваху другъ друга, ядяху вся нечисто, и брака у нихъ не бываше*, но умыкиваху у воды дѣвиця. И радимичи, и вятичи, и сѣверъ одинъ обычай имяху: живяху в лѣсѣ, яко же и всякий звѣрь, *ядуще все нечисто*, и срамословье в нихъ . . . *и браци не бываху въ нихъ, но игрища межю селы, . . . ту умыкаху жены собѣ . . . имяху же по двѣ и по три жены*. . . . Си же творяху обычая кривичи и *прочии погании, не вѣдуще закона божия*.[15]

[13] 'Thus it happened: they spoke not of their own will, but according to the will of God.' (*Ibid.* p. 16.)

[14] 'As in the days of Pharaoh, the tsar of Egypt, when they brought Moses . . . thus it came to pass: the Egyptians perished from (the hands of) Moses, but at first they ruled them. Thus these were ruling, but later they were ruled themselves; so it came to pass: the Russian princes rule over the Khazars up to this day.' (*Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.)

[15] 'They had their own customs and the faith of their fathers and their heritage, each their own ways. The Polyane had the *gentle and quiet customs* of their fathers, and (showed) modesty towards their daughters-in-law and their sisters . . . *they had bridal customs*. . . . But the Drevlyane live in *bestial fashion, living like cattle: they kill each other, they eat everything unclean, and they have no marriages*, instead they abduct their maidens. And the Radimichi, and Vyatichi and Severyane have the same customs: they live in the woods, like any animal, *eating everything unclean*, and use shameless language . . . *and they have no marriages, but only games between the villages . . . they abduct their women . . . they have two or three wives each* . . . Thus do the Krivichi and *the other pagans, who do not know the law* (faith) *of God*.' (*Ibid.*, I, pp. 14–15.)

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Monogamous marriages, abstaining from unclean food, fasting and the prohibition of killing, especially of nearest relatives, belong to the first requirements of the church as regards converted pagans, as can be seen from the instructions given to Bulgaria. There can be no doubt that the habits of the Polyane clearly show them as a Christian people, in contrast to the other eastern Slavs.

The most popular legend in Russia concerning the conversion of the Rus′ to Christianity tells how the envoys from Kiev travelled to the east, west and south, seeking the best creed, which they finally found in Constantinople. Having seen the Moslems in the east, they travel to the west, and the first Christians whom they encounter here are Germans, not Slavs; in the second half of the 9th century, when the Rhos were christened under Photius, Moravia was already a Christian country. The envoys from Kiev must have either bypassed the western Slavs, or they must have come at a time prior to the conversion of Moravia. Apart from the name of Volodimer, who sent his envoys to the west, there is nothing to link this legend either with Volodimer or with Askold and Dir. The hostility expressed here against western Christianity,

> И придохомъ в Нѣмци, и видѣхомъ въ храмѣхъ многи службы творяща, а красоты не видѣхомъ никоеяже[16]

is much more characteristic of the iconoclastic period, when relations between Rome and Constantinople were strained, than of the later orthodox period.

The much disputed Rhos, who came with the Byzantine embassy of Theophilus to the Frankish court at Ingelheim in May 839, as recorded by the *Annales Bertiniani*, raise several important points. What made the emperor Theophilus, an energetic but rather cruel man, so well disposed towards those dreaded Rhos whom a generation later Photius called the most cruel and bloodthirsty people—so that he, Theophilus, explicitly asked Louis the Pious to assist them on their journey home to their native land through the Frankish kingdom, because in their former territory, ruled by a kagan, *caganus*, they were harassed by savage tribes? Who could be more savage than the Rhos themselves? The only plausible explanation is the assumption that those Rhos at Ingelheim were Christians, converted by the iconoclasts, whom the emperor was most eager to protect, and who in their native land were attacked by neighbouring pagan tribes—savages in the eyes of the Christian emperor, in contrast to his converts.

On this assumption, the Rhos at Ingelheim can be identified with

[16] 'And we came to the Germans, and we saw them holding many services in their churches, but we did not perceive anything beautiful.' (*Ibid.*, p. 75.)

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the people of Kiev. They were converted in the reign of Theophilus, their territory was attacked by the pagan eastern Slavs, Drevlyane and others, whom the *Povest'* itself depicts as savages in contrast to the Polyane, and they were finally subjugated by the Khazar kagan, *caganus*, as mentioned in Theophilus' letter to Louis the Pious. Kyy evidently came to Constantinople not only with the native Polyane, but also with a considerable number of Scandinavians, as in later years did Askold and Dir, Oleg, Igor and Svyatoslav (an interesting parallel between Kyy and Svyatoslav—both tried to settle on the Danube).

The ingenious project of the learned patriarch John the Grammarian to appease the troublesome barbarians from the north, the Scandinavian Rhos and the Slavs, by means of conversion to Christianity had evidently collapsed during the reign of Theophilus himself, probably much to the delight of the more fanatical and less farsighted among his iconodule adversaries. It is possible that not only later orthodox writers but also the iconoclasts themselves preferred to say as little as possible about their unsuccessful attempt to convert the Rhos.

IV

As mentioned above, at a later stage the Russian chroniclers expurgated the Russian annals of all records concerning a conversion to Christianity prior to Volodimer, leaving only here and there traces of these earlier attempts at conversion, like the Christian church in Kiev, mentioned in Igor's treaty, and the Christian father and son during Volodimer's early pagan reign.

Nevertheless the first conversion in the days of Kyy seems to have been properly recorded in an earlier version of the *Povest'*, as can be seen from the material so far presented, but with the purpose of making it appear as an achievement of the orthodox, iconodule government of Constantinople in the reign of Michael III.

Two chronicles, the Novgorod I Chronicle and the *Ustyuzhskiy Svod*, that do not mention Kyy's journey to Constantinople, give instead the following peculiar combination, describing the three brothers, Kyy, Shchok and Khoriv, and the pagan customs of the Polyane:

> Поляне . . . бяху же поганѣ, жруще озером и кладязем и рощениемъ, *якоже прочии погани.* В си же времена бысть въ Грѣчько земли цесарь, именемъ Михаилъ, и мати его Ирина, иже *проповѣдаеть покланяние иконамъ в пръвую недѣлю поста.*[17]

[17] 'The Polyane . . . were heathens who made offerings to the lakes and springs and groves, *like other pagans.* In those days there was an emperor in the land of Greece by the name of Michael and his mother Irene, *who preach the worship of icons in the first week of lent.*' (Novgorod I Chronicle, Moscow/Leningrad, 1950, p. 105.)

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Contrasting the pagan rites of the Polyane with icon-worship in Constantinople suggests some kind of connection between the two—the pagans evidently accepted baptism and abstained from pagan rites. At the same time it has to be observed that the name of the emperor's mother is incorrect: Irene (780–802), who restored icon-worship in 787, was the mother of Constantine VI, not Michael III, whose mother's real name, Theodora (842–856), is preserved by the Nikon Chronicle, while the majority mention Irene. One may wonder how this mistake occurred and whether these two names, Michael and 'his mother Irene', who worshipped holy icons, were the original names contained by the chronicle. The text of the *Ustyuzhskiy Svod*, although very corrupt, has the word 'idol' ('жряху идолом в колодизех'—'made offerings to the idols in springs'[18]). The iconoclasts regarded icon-worship as pagan idolatry, and it seems more natural to contrast the pagan idolatry of the Polyane with the abomination of idols in Constantinople, i.e. iconoclasm, than with icon-worship. Considering the peculiar mistake regarding the name of the empress who worshipped icons, so dominant in Russian annals, one may be led to the conclusion that the original text contained not the name of the iconodule Michael with the wrong mother, but the name of Theophilus, who abominated idols and icons alike. The verb 'propovedayet'' is in the singular, and not in the dual, as would be appropriate for the two, emperor and empress combined. The same singular and mention of the emperor alone is contained in the phrase following this passage in the Novgorod I Chronicle: 'При семь /же цари паки/ приидоша Русь на Царьградъ' ('in his reign /of this emperor/ the Rus' came to Tsargrad').

The majority of chronicles do not contrast the pagan idolatry of the Polyane with icon-worship in Constantinople. They place this passage about Michael and his mother at the beginning of the text, describing the attack on Constantinople, like the Novgorod I Chronicle quoted above, naming Askold and Dir as the attackers (the Novgorod I Chronicle does not mention their names). The notoriously wrong date of this attack—A.M. 6374—and several other details (like the number of the Russian boats) show considerable discrepancies compared with Byzantine and other sources. As mentioned above, the Tolkovaya Paleya dates the raid on Constantinople, naming Askold and Dir, the year A.M. 6334 (see note 6 above). A confusion between 30 and 70 is very likely, if the numerals were written in glagolitic letters (see pp. 112–13); *derv* (30) and *nas* (70) have both a similar loop at the right. It is possible that the Paleya and

[18] *Ustyuzhskiy Letopisnyy Svod*, Moscow/Leningrad, 1950, p. 19.

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the Novgorod I Chronicle have preserved the original correct date and version: an attack took place in A.M. 6334 (834) and was recorded following the description of Kyy's rule over the Polyane, in the reign of Theophilus. A.M. 6334 was later corrupted to A.M. 6374, that puzzled the historians so long, was arbitrarily connected with the wrong date of Michael's accession, A.M. 6360 (see below) and defined as his fourteenth regnal year, while being originally the fifth regnal year of Theophilus, 834. The names of Askold and Dir (which are not contained in Byzantine sources) were later inserted, just like the names of Michael and Irene. Two different attacks that led to the conversion of the barbarians, Kyy in the reign of Theophilus (834) and Askold and Dir in the reign of Michael III (860), have been confused.

The story about Kyy has no date in the majority of chronicles, being placed in the earlier undated part, except for the same two chronicles mentioned above, the Novgorod I Chronicle and the *Ustyuzhskiy Svod*, that bring it under two dates, A.M. 6360 and A.M. 6362. Furthermore, these two chronicles have it under the title 'Nachalo zemli ruskoi', a similar heading, without the date, being used by various other chronicles, implying that Kyy's story signifies some kind of beginning.

The majority of chronicles begin dating the events with the year A.M. 6360, the other notoriously wrong date of the *Povest'*:

> Въ лѣто *6360*, индикта *15* день, наченшю Михаилу царствовати, нача ся прозывати Руска земля.[19]

It remains problematical what kind of new name or beginning was implied, especially as the majority of the Russian chronicles give as their next text the title 'Nachalo ruskoi zemli' under the year A.M. 6362, without any narrative text whatsoever. The main problem is the date itself, A.M. 6362, evidently closely connected with the preceding A.M. 6360, supposedly the year of Michael III's accession. Michael III was enthroned in 842 as a child, after the death of Theophilus, and having deposed his mother Theodora, he began his independent rule in 856. A.M. 6360, 15th indiction (i.e. A.D. 852, Byzantine era) is in no way connected with his accession. However, these early dates of the *Povest'* are given according to the Pseudo-Alexandrian era, which is well attested in Byzantine as well as in Russian annals of the 9th and 10th centuries (the first date of the Byzantine era is A.M. 6376, the accession of Basil I in September 867).[20]

[19] 'In the year 6360, the fifteenth day of the indiction (text corrupt), when Michael began to reign, the Russian land began to be named' (sic). (*Povest'*, I, p. 17.)

[20] The date A.M. 6360, 15th indiction (see note 19 above) is a date of the Byzantine era. However, two chronicles have preserved it as a date of the Pseudo-Alexandrian era,

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The date A.M. 6360 as the year of Michael's III accession is based on the 'Χρονογράφικον Σύντομον' of the patriarch Nicephorus. The discrepancies between the preserved Greek text and the Russian figures may have been caused by the fact that the Russian text was derived from a Greek version, which, although no longer preserved in Byzantine manuscripts, must have been much closer to the original *Chronographikon Syntomon*, as composed by the patriarch himself, than the present version.

Chronographikon Syntomon				*Povest'*	
Original version (reconstructed)	*A.M.*	Present manuscripts	*A.M.*		*A.M.*
Christ born	5500		5500		5500
Christ to Constantine	318		318		318
Constantine to Michael II, Balbus (beginning of reign)	502	Constantine to Theophilus (end of reign)	530	Constantine to Michael III (beginning of reign)	542
Since creation	6320		6348	(8th indiction)	6360
or A.D. 820 (Pseudo-Alexandrian era)		or A.D. 840 (Byzantine era)		or A.D. 860 (Pseudo-Alexandrian era; most chronicles have 15th indiction 6360/A.D. 852—see above, p. 110)	

The patriarch composed his *Chronographikon Syntomon* according to the Pseudo-Alexandrian era, which is attested by the way he dated his *Apologeticus atque Antirrhetici*,[21] in contrast to the preserved Byzantine manuscripts of the *Chronographikon Syntomon*. The name of the emperor was Michael, the Second Balbus, father of Theophilus and grandfather of Michael III, as can be seen from the heading: ΑΠΟ ΑΔΑΜ ΜΕΧΡΙ ΧΡΟΝΩΝ ΜΙΧΑΗΛ καὶ Θεοφίλου υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ ἔχουσα οὕτος.[22] The emperor's name signified the beginning of

assigning it to the 8th indiction: 'Въ лѣто 6360 индикта 8 день.'—Vologda-Perm Chronicle, PSRL, xxvi, 1959, p. 15; Nikanorov Chronicle, PSRL, xxvii, 1962, p. 17. The initial conversion of Bulgaria in 863 (not the return to the see of Constantinople, 869, often referred to as 'Kreshchena byst Bolgarskaya zemlya', A.M. 6377, Byzantine era), is dated as A.M. 6363 by the Chronicle of Avraamka (PSRL, xvi, 1889, p. 22), and by the Paleya (V. M. Istrin, *op. cit.* 1906, p. 42; *Povest'*, II, p. 230). The seventh ecumenical council of 787 is dated by the Paleya as A.M. 6287 (see note 1 above). Among Byzantine writers this Pseudo-Alexandrian era was employed by Symeon Magister, Georgius Monachus Continuatus (A), '*Βίοι τῶν νέων Βασιλέων*' (Corpus Bonn, 1838, pp. 603–756, 763–871) and by the patriarch Nicephorus (see note 21 below). Inasmuch as the *Povest'* dates the baptism of Bulgaria by the year A.M. 6366, this seems to be a corrupted date of the Pseudo-Alexandrian era A.M. 6363, 3-gamma being misread for 6-stigma, ϛ<Γ.

[21] P. J. Alexander, *The Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople*, Oxford, 1958, pp. 186–88.

[22] Nicephorus, *Breviarium*, Corpus Bonn, 1829, I, p. 738.

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his reign, as in the Russian text, in contrast to the preserved Byzantine text, where the name of Theophilus signifies the end of his rule. The patriarch Nicephorus died during the reign of Michael II and never witnessed the accession of his son Theophilus.

It is noteworthy that the present Greek version of the *Chronographikon Syntomon* dates the end of Theophilus' reign not by the actual year of his death, 842 (A.M. 6350), as preserved in some manuscripts, but by the year 840 (A.M. 6348, Byzantine era), the year when Theophilus during his lifetime crowned his little son Michael (III) Augustus (it is not unusual in Byzantine chronography to date the accession of an emperor by the year when he was crowned Augustus in the lifetime of his predecessor).

If the Byzantine scribe had continued the original version of the patriarch's work to this year, 840, without any other changes, we should have had the following dates (not recorded in present manuscripts), and the difference from the Russian text would have been as follows:[23]

Chronographikon Syntomon		*Povest'*	
	A.M.		*A.M.*
Christ born	5500		5500
Christ to Constantine	318		318
Constantine to Michael III	522	Michael III	542
Since creation	6340		6360

This difference of 20 in the last two figures, 522–542 and 6340–6360 could be explained by the simple fact that when reading the Greek text the translator found the letters K and M both for the names Konstantinos and Michael, and for the figures 20 (522) φκβ′ and 40 (6340) ϛτμ′. If he wrote the Slavonic text in glagolitic and used the glagolitic letters K and M both for the names—'от Константина же до Михаила'—and for the numerals 522 and 6340 like the Greek text, he would transform a 20 (K) into a 40, and a 40 (M) into a 60, because the glagolitic letters have a different numerical value from the Greek letters, although denoting the same sound. Thus 522 could have been turned into 542, and A.M. 6340, i.e. A.D. 840—a perfectly correct date of Michael's coronation as Augustus—transformed into A.M. 6360. The Pseudo-Alexandrian era was short-lived; it seems to have been discarded in Constantinople as early as the second half of the 10th century, and dates written

[23] A. A. Shakhmatov expressed a different opinion in 'Iskhodnaya tochka letochisleniya *Povesti vremennykh let*' (*Zhurnal Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveshcheniya*, St Petersburg, 1897, Part 310, pp. 217–22). M. N. Tikhomirov ('Nachalo russkoy zemli' in *Voprosy istorii*, IX, Moscow/Leningrad, 1962, pp. 40–2) and B. A. Rybakov (*Drevnyaya Rus'*, Moscow, 1963, pp. 162–71), following Shachmatov, sought a different solution.

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in this era subsequently belong to a period when the glagolitic alphabet was still in full use.[24]

Two other dates that seem to have undergone the same mutilation are A.M. 6367, when Novgorod and the north were paying tribute to the Varangians, while Kiev and the south were tributaries of the Khazars, and A.M. 6370, the year when Rurik came to Novgorod, and Askold and Dir conquered Kiev; this must have happened before and not after the attack on Constantinople in 860.

> Асколдъ же и Диръ остаста въ градѣ семь, и многи варяги съвокуписта, и начаста владѣти польскою землею.[25]

These words imply that a considerable time must have elapsed before Askold and Dir ventured to attack Constantinople in 860. The real dates in question are 847 (A.M. 6347), when Kiev and the south were still under the Khazar yoke, and the arrival of Askold and Dir in Kiev in 850 (A.M. 6350—Greek N = 50, glagolitic N = 70), i.e. ten years of rule over Kiev before they set out to attack Constantinople in 860.

The revised chronology shows that the mysterious beginning of the land of Rus' is dated by the accession of Michael III in 840 (A.M. 6340) and 842 (A.M. 6342):

> 6340 . . . наченшю Михаилу царствовати, нача ся прозывати Руска земля.
> 6342 . . . Начало земли Рускои.

The accession of Michael III signifies in Byzantine chronology the restoration of icon-worship, although the latter in fact took place not earlier than spring 843. If a mysterious beginning in a distant pagan land like Rus' is connected and dated by the triumph of orthodoxy in Constantinople, one may assume that this beginning was of an ecclesiastical nature, most probably conversion to Christianity (*cf.* the quotations from the Novgorod I Chronicle and the *Ustyuzhskiy Svod* contrasting paganism in Kiev and icon-worship in Constantinople, pp. 108 and 109 above). At the same time the years involved, A.M. 6340 and A.M. 6342, in fact imply the rule of the iconoclast Theophilus, who died on 20 January 842 (1 September 841 being the new year A.M. 6342). The Russian chronicler was evidently trying to date the beginning of the land of Rus' by the earliest possible date that could signify the restoration of icon-worship, whereas in fact it happened during the reign of an iconoclast emperor.

[24] K. Ericsson, 'Das Anfangsdatum der Laurentiuschronik A.M. 6360' (*Annales Instituti Slavici*, Wiesbaden, 1966, Vol. 1/2).

[25] 'Askold and Dir settled in this town (Kiev) and assembled many Varangians and started to rule over the land of the Polyane.' (*Povest'*, I, pp. 18–19).

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A last attempt to blacken the memory of the heretic Theophilus, in the best iconodule tradition, is attested by the use of his name in its Greek form 'Fefyola', as handed down to the Russians in later years: 'Fefyola' means a fool ('эх ты, *Фефёла!*'[26]). Orthodox Constantinople presented the wicked heretic Theophilus to the pagan barbarians, whom he had first converted, as a foolish man, in which capacity the name remained in Russian usage over a thousand years.

V

After the attack on Constantinople in June 860 and the subsequent defeat of the Rhos, as attested by the Nikon Chronicle,

> Възвратишася Асколдъ и Диръ отъ Царяграда *въ малѣ дружинѣ, и бысть въ Киевѣ плачь велій*,[27]

the imperial government received an embassy from the Khazars in autumn of 860, asking the emperor to send a learned man to defend the Christian faith against Moslems and Jews, so that they who sent the message might choose the best creed. The emperor Michael III consulted the patriarch, and the patriarchal librarian, Constantine the philosopher, was sent to Derbent, where in spring of 861 he converted and baptised some 200 people. The national origin of those who sent the message and were christened by Constantine at the Khazar court has never been properly defined. They cannot have been Khazars themselves, for the Khazars had accepted the Jewish faith more than a century before, and as plainly shown by the *Vita* of St Cyril, held the Jewish faith when he arrived in Derbent without displaying the slightest inclination to abandon it, while these people show an open preference for Christianity:

> Приидѫ же съли къ цѣсарю отъ Козаръ, глаголѭште: яко испрьва *единого бога знаемъ*, иже естъ надъ вьсѣми, и *томоу сѧ кланяемъ на въстокъ*, и *обычаѥ своѥ ины стоудьны* дрьжѧште. Евреи же оустѧтъ ны вѣрѫ ихъ и дѣтѣль прити, ѭ а Срацини на дроугѫѭ странѫ, миръ даѭште и дары мъногы, ѧтжѧтъ ны на своѭ вѣрѫ галголѭште: яко наша вѣра естъ добрѣиши вьсѣхъ ѩзыкъ. то сего ради *сълемъ къ вамъ, старѫѭ дроужьбѫ и любъвь дрьжѧште. ѩзыкъ бо вельи сѫште цѣсарьство отъ бога дрьжите*, и вашего съвѣта въпрашаѭште просимъ мѫжа кънижьна отъ васъ, *да аште прѣпьритъ Евреѥ и Срацины, то по вашѫ сѧ вѣрѫ имемъ*.[28]

[26] M. Vasmer, *Russisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Heidelberg, 1958, III, p. 206.

[27] 'Askold and Dir returned from Tsargrad with the rest of their forces, and there was great lamenting in Kiev.' (Nikon Chronicle, PSRL, IX, p. 9.)

[28] 'Envoys came to the emperor from the Khazars, saying: we know from the beginning the one God, who is above all, and bow to him to the east, and the customs we have are chaste. But the Jews urge us to accept their creed and righteousness, and the Saracens towards their side, offering a peace treaty and many presents, trying to win us over to their creed, saying: our creed is the best of all the (other) peoples' (creeds). Therefore

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This message, although definitely not coming from the Khazars themselves, could hardly have been delivered on behalf of ignorant pagans. They know one God and, resisting pressure from both Saracens and Jews, i.e. Khazars, show some preference for the east (the eastern church?) and they are proud of their civilised customs. They send to the Christian emperor because of former friendly relations with the empire, and acknowledge the political supremacy of the emperor over other nations. This message bears a remarkable resemblance to the attitude of the people whom Constantine was going to christen at Derbent.

On his arrival there in spring 861, where at the great banquet in the kagan's presence he was involved in a very learned theological dispute with highly trained Jewish scholars (Yudei, as the *Vita* calls them repeatedly), the kagan 'and the elders' ('Каганъ Козарьскъ съ начѧльныими мѫжи') expressed the wish to be instructed by Constantine:

> '... Паче же аште хоштеши покои обрѣсти доушамъ нашимъ, вьсяко исправленье притъчами съкажи намъ по чиноу, его же тѧ въпрашаемъ'.[29]

Stating bluntly that they are 'an illiterate people' ('нъ мы есмъ некънижьна чѧдь') which can hardly refer to the Khazar kagan himself, they fixed the day for the discussion ('нарекъше дьнь, въ ньже бесѣдѫ о вьсѣхъ сихъ сътворѧтъ'). On this day Constantine was confronted by a people who were indeed very primitive and ignorant; he had accordingly to choose very simple parables. But in contrast to his opponents at the banquet, these people really wished to know which was the best creed of the three ('съкажи намъ, чьстьнъи мѫжоу, притъчами и оумомь вѣрѫ, яже естъ лоучьши вьсѣхъ'[30]). This time Islam is represented (at the banquet Constantine was confronted by Jewish theologians alone), for one of the counsellors, 'well trained in Saracen wickedness' ('Срациньскѫ зълобѫ добрѣ вѣды') vigorously opposes Constantine.

It is important to observe that these people seem to represent a small separate group of their own, mostly referred to as 'all' ('вьси'), 'of them' ('отъ нихъ'), 'one of their counsellors' ('единъ же отъ нихъ съвѣтьникъ'), and the first counsellor is called in the presence of the Khazar kagan 'the first of *their* counsellors' ('прьвъи съвѣтьникъ

---

we send unto you, for the sake of old friendship and love. For your rule over the people is from God, and we request your counsel, asking to send a learned man from your (capital), and should he defeat the Jews and Saracens, we shall accept your creed.' (*Vita Cyrilli*, ed. F. Pastrnek, *Dějiny* . . ., chapter viii, p. 172.)

[29] 'If you wish to attain peace for our souls, tell us every amendment by means of parables according to the order, as we shall ask you.' (*Ibid.*, pp. 190-1.)

[30] 'Tell us, venerable sir, by parables and arguments, which is the best creed of all.' (*Ibid.*, p. 191.)

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отъ нихъ'), while at the banquet the first counsellor was referred to as '*his*', i.e. 'the kagan's first counsellor' ('прьвъи съвѣтьникъ *его*/ кагана'). Not once are they called 'Yudei' like the men at the banquet.

They seem to find some fault in being a Christian, for Constantine has to compare the Christian faith with a bitter medicine that later bears sweet fruit—eternal life in paradise—probably because of the tithe, the heavy taxation levied on Christians, while in the Moslem world the true believer goes tax-free and the infidel bears the burden of taxation. Despite the Moslems in their midst the majority supported their first counsellor when, vigorously attacking both Islam and Judaism, he professed Christianity with a remarkable credo:

> Рече же прьвъи съвѣтьникъ отъ нихъ къ прьятелемъ Срациньскомъ: Божьеѭ помоштьѭ гость сь вьсѫ гръдынѭ Жидовьскѫѭ на землѭ съврьже, а вашѫ на онъ полъ рѣкы прѣврьже яко скврьньнѫ. рече же и къ вьсѣмъ людьмъ: *якоже далъ есть богъ власть надъ вьсѣми ѩзыкы цѣсарю христьяньскоу и мѫдрость съврьшенѫ, тако и вѣрѫ въ нихъ*, и *кромѣ еѩ никътоже не можетъ живота вѣчьнаего жити*. Богоу же слава въ вѣкы. и рѣшѧ вьси аминь.[31]

His belief in the Christian emperor (sic!) and *perfect wisdom*, that alone grants eternal life, points to the name Sophia, St Sophia of Constantinople, the great church of eastern Christendom, i.e. the Christian Church and not merely the philosophical idea, a name that these people knew by its translated form into their own native tongue. They promised to accept baptism there and then, rejecting Islam, Judaism and the west (sic!), as well as their former heathen customs and unlawful marriages:

> . . . А иже отъ насъ на западъ кланяетъ сѧ, или Жидовьскы молитвѫ творитъ, или Срациньскѫ вѣрѫ дрьжитъ, скоро съмрьть прииметъ отъ насъ . . . отъврьгъше сѧ мрьзостьи поганьскыихъ и женитвъ безаконьныихъ.[32]

This last passage, where in the presence of the Khazar kagan they threaten to kill anyone who professes Judaism, confirms once more that these people are not Khazars themselves; but they are undoubtedly under Khazar sway, like the Goths, the Alans and some of the eastern Slavs, including the Polyane of Kiev.

There is every reason to believe that these people here at Derbent

[31] 'Their first counsellor said to his Saracen comrades: "By the help of God the guest has hurled to the ground all Jewish pride, and yours he has flung like filth half across the river". And he said to all the people: "*As God has given the power over all the nations to the Christian emperor and Perfect Wisdom, so I believe in them, and without this no-one can achieve eternal life.* Glory be to God forever and ever." And they all said, Amen.' (*Ibid.*, pp. 193–4.)

[32] 'And those of us who bow to the west, or say Jewish prayers, or hold the Saracen creed, those shall soon suffer death from our hands . . . having repudiated pagan abominations and unlawful marriages.' (*Ibid.*, p. 194.)

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are none other than the Polyane, the last remnants of a Christian flock from the days of Theophilus: their envoys arrive in Constantinople *after* the defeat of Askold and Dir (860), they prefer Christianity, especially the eastern church, to Islam and Judaism, they had friendly relations with the empire in former days, and acknowledge the supremacy of the emperor in Constantinople; they know the name of St Sophia (where according to Russian legend their envoys first witnessed the splendid eastern liturgy) by its *translated* name, like the names of Leo/Lev, Theodotus/Bogdan and Theophilus/Bogolyub, and the envoy chosen by the emperor and patriarch, the philosopher Constantine, happens to know a Slavonic dialect.

A further confirmation that these people are the people from Kiev is contained in the kagan's letter to the emperor, in which he promises at the emperor's request to render military service:

> . . . Есмъ же вьси мы дроузи и прьятели твоемоу цѣсарьствоу и готови на слоужьбѫ твоѭ, яможе потрѣбоуеши.[33]

The Khazars did not serve in the imperial army, but the territory of Kiev repeatedly sent military forces to Constantinople, and the Varangians served as imperial bodyguards. The author of the *Vita* once more confuses the Khazars with the Polyane under Khazar sway.

Constantine had been sent to Derbent to convert not a new or unknown people, but to win back for Christianity its former converts, the Polyane, or, as they called them at Constantinople, the Rhos, at their own explicit request, and to regain control over the territory of Kiev, which now, after the defeat of Askold and Dir, the Khazars seem to have claimed as well. During Constantine's stay at Cherson in the Crimea on his way to Derbent in 860–1, a Khazar army appeared at the gates of the city, evidently prepared to resist any military aggression over the disputed Kievan territory (Constantine managed to appease the Khazar general). The *Vita* records that as a special favour granted to Constantine, in whom the kagan was well pleased, he was permitted to ransom 200 prisoners belonging to the empire—exactly the same number as those who were converted. This could refer to the same people, Polyane, kept perhaps as hostages at the Khazar court, who, having heard of the defeat of Askold and Dir in June–July 860, sent messengers from Derbent 'from the Khazars' ('ot khozar') to the emperor asking to be taken once more under the sway of the emperor of Constantinople, as in the days of Kyy; people whom the imperial envoy regarded as imperial subjects, prisoners of the Khazars. Owing to the heretical

[33] 'For we are all friends and associates of your empire, and are prepared to serve you, whenever you desire.' (*Ibid.*, p. 195.)

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origin of their Christian creed and their former adherence to the empire, neither their nationality nor their native land is mentioned by the author of the *Vita*. Only once does he slip—the much-disputed Gospel and Psalter *Rossicis litteris scriptum* ('Евангелье и псалтырь росьскы/роушькыми/писмены пьсано'), shown to Constantine at Cherson on his way to Derbent, need not be any kind of misspelling (for 'соурски', 'Syriac', etc.), for not only had the Rus' been converted a generation before, but those who converted them had translated various names into their language—Lev, Bogdan, Bogolyub, Mudrost'—and a Gospel and Psalter translated into the language of that disputed territory would have been a welcome proof to support imperial claims over the Polyane.

In view of these facts it is readily understandable why Constantine 'with tears in his eyes' addressed these people as 'brothers, fathers, friends and people' ('братрье и отьци и дроузи и чѧда'), when their first counsellor and 'all the people' pledged their adherence to Christianity. One can also understand the delight of the patriarch Photius over the conversion of the Rhos, so vividly expressed in his encyclical letter, for the prodigal son had returned home. The above would further explain why the Russian annals so vividly recall the personality of the philosopher from Greece (making him appear, of course, at the court and in the days of Volodimer), for none other than the Rus', the Polyane of Kiev, had been christened by Constantine himself at Derbent.

According to the Italian *Vita* of St Cyril, Rostislav of Moravia referred to the achievements of Constantine in the Khazar land, when asking for instruction in his own mother tongue—a most peculiar request to be presented to the emperor Michael III, who regarded even Latin as an unworthy, barbarian language as attested by the answer of pope Nicolas I.[34] Since Constantine had actively christened at Derbent, while Rostislav explicitly stated that the people of Moravia had accepted baptism already, his reference to Constantine's activity at the Khazar court can only mean that the people at Derbent were Slavs, who had received instruction in their own Slavonic mother tongue.

The conversation between Michael III and Constantine, when the latter, summoned to the emperor, was ordered to go to Moravia, is preserved in a rather corrupt version in which the emperor's answers do not tally with the philosopher's questions; Constantine expresses his willingness to go to Moravia on condition that he find there an alphabet already in existence:

. . . Съ радостьѭ идѫ тамо, *аште имѣѭтъ боукъви въ ѣзыкъ свои.* Глагола же цѣсарь къ немоу: *дѣдъ мои и отьць и ини мънози,*

[34] J. B. Bury, *History of the Eastern Roman Empire*, London, 1912, n. 1, p. 206.

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искавъше того, не сѫть того обрѣли: то како азъ могѫ то обрѣсти? Философъ же рече: то къто можетъ на водѫ бесѣдѫ напьсати и *еретичьско имѧ обрѣсти*?[35]

Disregarding the emperor's unsuitable answer, Constantine is apprehensive of the danger of being mistaken for a heretic—an alphabet brought by him from Constantinople might have got him into disrepute, evidently because the first alphabet for a Slavonic people was constructed in Constantinople by heretics, i.e. by the iconoclasts, a generation ago, for the converted Rus' of Kiev; no other conclusion could explain these words.

The emperor's answer would imply that he tried to resist pressure from somebody towards some kind of action, a reaction wholly unjustified by Constantine's modest request. Nobody expected the emperor Michael III to find the Slavonic alphabet, and that his father Theophilus—and least of all his grandfather, the illiterate Michael II, Balbus, who only with difficulty managed to write the six letters of his own name—had ever gone searching for a Slavonic alphabet is most unlikely. However, Michael's answer does not mention the word 'alphabet' and it seems more probable that the words 'искавъше того' and 'того обрѣли' imply something else: in connection with the Slavs probably conversion itself, which somebody prompted Michael III to undertake once more, a different conversation with a different person on quite a different occasion. When the envoys 'from the Khazars' (land)' arrived in 860, the emperor consulted with the patriarch, and it was probably Photius who urged him once more to undertake the task that his father and grandfather had tried to accomplish and had failed, as Michael III stated bluntly. The story about the three-headed bronze statue and the three pagan chiefs, although naming Theophilus as emperor, is placed in Theophanes Continuatus among the chapters concerning Michael II, probably because a similar attempt had already been made in his day; the conversion of the people of Kiev by Theophilus turned out to be a failure, and Michael III was reluctant to embark on the same scheme.

Nevertheless Constantine's mission at Derbent was crowned by success, largely owing to the previous efforts of the iconoclasts, averting a deadly peril for Constantinople and the whole empire: the conversion of the troublesome eastern Slavs and the dreaded Scandinavian Rhos to Islam (Kyy, and later Askold and Dir, attacked the capital as independent pagans, not as subjects of the caliph in Bagdad), with ensuing encirclement of the capital, as in the days of

[35] '" Willingly I would go, *if only they had letters in their own language*". The emperor said to him: "*My grandfather and father and many others have been seeking it, and could not attain it:* so how could I attain it?" The philosopher said: "Who could write a sermon on water and *acquire the name of a heretic*?"' (*Vita Cyrilli*, pp. 199–200.)

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Heraclius, when, in 626, Constantinople was besieged by the combined forces of the Persians from the south and the Avars and Slavs from the north, an attack vividly recalled during the Russian raid of 860. The prestige of the iconoclasts must have risen rapidly in the 860s, for the iconodule government resorted to drastic measures: the remains of the two most prominent iconoclasts, Constantine V, revered by his followers as a saint, and the patriarch John the Grammarian, were taken from their graves, kept in a public prison, publicly flogged on the hippodrome and finally burned. It is possible that during the Russian attack of 860 pious iconoclasts had rushed to the tomb of the great warrior Constantine V, as in the days of the Bulgarian attack of 813, imploring him to save the city; John the Grammarian must have been held in highest esteem despite deposition and exile in 842–3, for his remains, to everybody's amazement, were found clad in patriarchal robes.

Michael III sent Constantine to Moravia, stressing emphatically in his letter to Rostislav that he, the emperor, was sending a man of immaculate orthodox repute ('мѫжа чьстива и благовѣрьна, кънижьна зело и философа'), and that the alphabet he was bringing had been invented by this learned and righteous man during his, Michael's reign, and had not existed before:

> Богъ . . . *сътвори и нъıня въ наша лѣта*, явль боукъви въ вашь ѩзыкъ, егоже *не бѣ испрьва было* . . . и то ти послахомъ того, емоуже ѩ богъ яви.[36]

There can be little doubt that a Slavonic alphabet had been constructed by the iconoclasts, but being of heretical origin it may have been destroyed like all the other iconoclastic heritage, never to come to light again. How far the alphabet brought by Constantine to Moravia had anything to do with it requires a special examination and cannot be discussed here.

Despite the emperor's assurance, the Slavonic liturgy and alphabet remained stigmatised in the west as heretical; Casimir of Poland called the Masovians, who had the Slavonic liturgy, 'false Christians' in 1037 (i.e. *before* the schism): 'Superatis tot *falsis christocolis*, iam securi pugnate cum discolis'.[37] The clergy of Venice, an imperial city, where so many iconodules had fled during the iconoclastic persecution, met Constantine and Methodius in outrage and fury, mistaking them evidently for the hated iconoclasts, the very thing that Constantine had anticipated and dreaded.

[36] 'God has . . . *created in our days too*, and has revealed letters in your language, *that have not existed before* . . . and we are sending him to you, to whom God has revealed them.' (*Ibid.*, pp. 200–1.)

[37] *Galli anonymi cronicae* (*Monumenta Poloniae Historica*, Nova Series), Cracow, 1952, II, p. 47. *Cf.* K. Lanckorońska, *op. cit.*, p. 130; H. Paszkiewicz, *The Origin of Russia*, London, 1954, pp. 391–4.

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Popes Nicholas I and Hadrian II, however, had more reliable information concerning the two brothers and greeted them 'like angels'. To the pope Constantine probably revealed the full facts about the conversion of the Rhos of Kiev and his mission to Derbent: how Jewish Khazars had ruled over a defeated Christian people, how Jews and Moslems had been trying to convert them, and how a miserable bunch of forgotten Christian converts in all their half-pagan ignorance, captives on Khazar soil and in the presence of the Khazar kagan, still pledged themselves to Christianity.

The pope blessed the Slavonic books and the Slavonic liturgy was sung in the churches of Rome. Constantine received as his monastic name the name of St Cyril of Alexandria, the great champion of Christendom against pagans, Jews and heretics alike.

Thus to prevent the huge unbroken wall of Slavonic tribes stretching from the Dnepr to the Elbe from being converted by the Moslems, which would have carried Islam into the very heart of Europe, the Slavs were granted an exceptional privilege by both Rome and Constantinople: a liturgy and instruction in their own language. To save Christendom, pope and patriarch at the time of the first great rift, while anathematising each other, followed in the footsteps of a man whom they both condemned, a brilliant scholar and a great statesman—John the Grammarian, the last iconoclast patriarch.

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